

ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACE PAGE
From a part of the Caractacus Cartoon at Betteshanger (1843)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Silenus. Etching after J. H. Mortimer	xiv
The Wounded Heron (1837)	54
Alfred inciting the Saxons to resist the Danes (1847)	78
Study. Mrs. Thoby Prinsep	78
Satan calling up his Legions. By G. F. Watts, 1849-50, from a Sketch for a Design not carried farther	98
Miss Julia Jackson (Mrs. Leslie Stephen)	98
Miss Fenwick	146
Miss Emma Brandling (The Lady Lilford)	146
A Study (1874)	190
Miss Adeline Jackson	190
Love and Death (1879-87)	200
Miss Mary Jackson (Mrs. Herbert Fisher)	200
Love and Life (1884-85)	226
Olympus on Ida. From a small Sketch for the larger Picture	234
The Honourable Evelina Rothschild (Mrs. Clive Behrens)	234
Green Summer (1901-1903)	242
Lilian (1902-1904)	242
Statue of Lord Tennyson at Lincoln (1899-1903)	256
Physical Energy (1883-1904)	270
Whence! Whither! (1904)	276
Destiny (1904)	294

I

FRAGMENTARY NOTES

TO STUDENTS

I

UP the hillside of Excellence there must be no stopping to look for footprints—no stopping ! On art generally.

The way if not always rugged is always steep. Never mind where your predecessor has trod, but see where he has arrived. The student must not forget that though brilliant genius may enable an artist to produce rapidly, rapidity must never be aimed at. Art is the product of leisure, and will be judged and placed by leisure. Tintoretto and Velasquez painted with great dexterity and rapidity, and their works are admired for these qualities, possessing as they do others of the highest excellence,—yet even in their case it is interesting to note that the possessors of collections containing good examples of all, constantly turn with more affection to the gentle earnestness of earlier schools. There is no quality more admired and none so much respected as sincerity, even by the insincere.

In all things he undertakes, the work may be

THOUGHTS ON ART

On art generally. done honourably or dishonourably, but beyond that the art student finds nothing to stir his higher aspirations. If it does not occur to him that his work may help on the cause of humanity, he is not told so. It is not impressed upon him that there is any religious obligation associated with the cultivation of the special talent he is supposed to possess. The honourable youth entering on study for the church, or training to become a statesman, understands and feels that these conditions are annexed to the qualifications he labours to acquire. The poet acknowledges the like demands. The soldier and sailor feel that they are called upon to sustain the dignity and stability of the country, and that while their profession may lead to honour and wealth, the guiding star of their lives shines with a purer ray. The ordinary student of a profession which, almost more than any other, deals obviously with everything that is most beautiful and consequently farthest from the sordid accumulation of modern social conditions, receives as part of his training no intimation that anything is to be expected from him beyond a knowledge of anatomy and careful observations, and endeavours after faithful reproduction of natural physical effects. The earliest art, always devoted to great and serious objects, naturally carried with it great and serious consciousness. One cannot look upon the frescoes of Giotto, Orcagna, etc., without feeling that they were imbued with the same spirit that inspired the *Divina Commedia*. The service the

THOUGHTS ON ART

IV

Beauty in
art.

All that would be out of place in the boudoir of the most refined princess is equally out of place in refined art. Frankness is desirable, but should be without coarseness of suggestion.

V

The practice
of art.

An artist's work should be his first and his last thought.

VI

Simplicity.

The great poet and the great artist can forget himself and his means in his work, but this can only be when mastery over them has rendered him independent.

VII

Sincerity.

Sincerity of belief, and sincerity in action—these two will never fail to produce results. The higher the conception for belief, and the more sincere the action, the worthier and greater will be the result. In all cases where any artistic evidence has come down to us, there is one thing in common—evident sincerity.

What I try to point out to every one now is that whatever is done from sincere conviction must come to something. Wherever one finds it, wherever one sees it, the mark is there plain enough. On the other hand, if the sincere conviction is wanting, or the work is for some other end first, and not because it is the only thing the

THOUGHTS ON ART

man desires, an impression of vagueness is the inevitable result. I believe this is the most important and valuable truth to bear in mind throughout life. Sincerity.

VIII

We are not Greeks or Italians, and must not try to reproduce their art, but as art must speak through the representations of material forms, the principles governing material forms, being laws of nature, belong especially neither to Greeks nor Italians ; therefore we must, so far as those principles are concerned, be at one with them. The unchanging and unchangeable laws and principles of creation which the Greeks unquestionably discovered must be the same in all parts and climes, and therefore as applicable now as then. Nor does this apply merely and exclusively to the outward expression in painting and sculpture. Symbols by which impressions and feelings are expressed will continue to be used in art, as they are used as metaphors in poetry. For instance, in modern as in ancient poetry are found such expressions as "the mountain frowned," "the calm lake smiled," "an angry sea." Again, observe how naturally, how inevitably one uses the word light for intelligence ; and this because both the poet and the painter have to make use of figurative language to express ideas. All such language from the poet is accepted as a matter of course ; it is only when the painter makes use of these symbols that it is objected to, The language of art.

THOUGHTS ON ART

The language of art. and people say, "Ah, I don't understand symbolic pictures, symbolism is not the province of art."

IX

Of form. The Greeks, Mr. Watts said, had taught him all his principles of form. After very careful study he found that they, perceiving in the skeleton the identity with modifications of the structure of the lower animals, took the greatest pains to accentuate all that belonged exclusively to the human. They accentuated these so as to depart as far as possible from all that belonged to the animal. A careful examination of their work will prove that the truth of it is perfectly marvellous. But if the finest man ever born is set by the side of it, it would be found that it was no portrait. Art is art and not nature. For an example, take the human head. The Greek accentuated the straightness of the forehead, the projection of the brows, the straightness of the line of the nose, the size and looseness of the chin, because they were all entirely human characteristics. The Greeks shortened the space between the chest and stomach, and lengthened it from the throat to below the breast in man and woman.

In the frieze of the Parthenon a considerable importance in size is given to the head, for the reason that as the figures are many and grouped together, the head requires an importance not necessary where the whole figure is used to represent the idea. Therefore in the groups of the

THOUGHTS ON ART

frieze an importance was given to the head by Of form. purposely somewhat enlarging it, and in the separate figure a more generally symmetrical balance was given to the whole by somewhat diminishing it. In the frieze, therefore, the head counts for so much more. This was felt to be a more decorative treatment.

X

The big oblique muscle is next in nobility to Of form. the pectoral muscle, but this is so seldom developed now that it is rare to find a model in which it is well marked. The Greeks made much of the great oblique and of the pectoral. They gave prominence to the head, for although they made it rather small, it was distinguished and prominent from being raised up on the column of the neck and out from the plane of the shoulders. Then the pectoral muscle was made large and grand, covering as it did the chamber of the breath of life. Finally the oblique was made large, while the muscles of the stomach beside it were made very little of. They made much of the chamber of the heart, and little of the kitchen of the body.

XI

Form is the only expression in art that is not Of form. dependent on vagaries of taste, having scientific laws for its principle. Although there are no defined rules that can be laid down, for what one man thinks beautiful another may dislike, there are some great principles which, when applied,

THOUGHTS ON ART

XIII

The special beauty of the human being lies Of form. in the junctures—therefore to disguise these is bad in principle. Perhaps the most beautiful form in the whole structure is the ankle and instep.

XIV

(When critising a painting Mr. Watts pointed Of form. out that the two convex forms of the thigh, the one opposite the other, are never found in a natural support.)

XV

All lines curve towards their object ; this is Of form. very important in the study of the human figure. For example, take the line of the eyelid round the eye-ball, or the green sheath of the rose-bud.

XVI

Beautiful drawing is when every part of the Of drawing. form is exactly represented. This will be when the delicate and precise line indicates the exact place and form of the bone, tendon, and muscle, and this is perhaps the most beautiful as it is the most architectural, but it does not harmonise with rich colouring and powerful light and shade. The same perfect drawing may be seen where there is apparently no drawing at all, when a finger, for example, is expressed by one sensitive glowing sweep of colour—if the precise and intricate form can be drawn upon the

THOUGHTS ON ART

Of drawing. member without making any change, it will be clear that all is there.

This peculiarity is so remarkable in the Parthenon fragments that the connoisseurs thought them quite unstudied, and masons' work. There is an arm, of which we have only a cast, the marble being still in its place, which is so simple that the ordinary observer might see nothing in it excepting that it is an arm, yet examination will give one the roll of the bone, and every delicate variety of plane consequent upon the action of the muscles.

XVII

Of form. It makes the whole difference if a drawing shows a thorough knowledge of the form of the bones. It may be like the particular skull or not, but to be a good drawing the underlying form must be understood. Where an artist wishes to express an abstract idea, this knowledge gives him all that is quite essential to him for the right expression of his idea. With this knowledge he finds himself free to give prominence to certain facts and to suppress others.

XVIII

Of form. The points of bony structure ought never to be lost under draperies. Never lose an edge! a clear edge has always a certain distinction about it. Keep the lines as flat as possible.

Avoid the imitation of the classical, by which I mean a certain sculpturesque arrangement, and

THOUGHTS ON ART

a great development of muscle, or rather an Of form.
evident development of muscle without due
regard to form.

It is not necessary that folds of drapery should define the form, but you must take care that they never represent something which is quite different.

XIX

It is not possible to represent nudity with any Of the
attempt at realism without drifting perilously nude in art.
near vulgarity. The nudity of the Greek statues, though presenting wonderfully natural facts, never shows any attempt at illusion. Great natural principles alone are insisted upon.

XX

When the clothes are taken off the model, Of the
the creature is naked, the movement is naked, nude in art.
the colour is naked, and the effect is naked ; without subscribing to the opinions of Mrs. Grundy, the taint of indecency clings to the idea of the *individual*. The better the picture is realistically, the worse suggestively. For the individual character of the figure suggests that it has been divested of clothing, a thing that would not be thought of in real life.

XXI

The human structure should be thoroughly The nude
studied, and then reconstructed by the artist, in in art.
his work, from such information. The modern

THOUGHTS ON ART

The nude realist works by sight, the natural artists (and in art. among these I should give a very high place to Lady Waterford) worked by an intuitive sense. No one can for a moment suppose me to mean that the sight need not, should not, be exercised, cultivated, and developed to the fullest extent, but it is quite useless or worse to work from models in a set position. To reproduce and realistically represent nakedness never can be desirable or necessary in a picture, with regard to any subject whatever.

XXII

Of study. The great artist, like the great poet, will forget himself and his means in his work, but this he will never be able to do if his means are insufficient. He must not be uncertain about the grammar or spelling ; if uncertain about these, his utterance will be crippled. The soldier fighting for his life does not think about the rules of fence, but he handles his weapon better for having learnt them.

XXIII

Of form. But the finest model ever found upon the earth, if set up in the position, for instance, of the Theseus, would not look like him. The Greeks understood where to accentuate the lines, and so to use them to express what they wanted to express.

An emphasis on the difference between the bone and the fleshy fibre marks the difference between greatness and mediocrity.

THOUGHTS ON ART

XXIV

Writing to a young artist he said : " I won't go Of fine art.
so far as to say that a work of art cannot be ugly
or incomplete, but I go so far as to say distinctly
that it cannot be so called unless it has some
approximation to the great qualities of natural
beauty and completion. I am quite sure no
really great work can have a right to be so called
unless it be complete from every point of view—
breadth enough for distance, and finish enough
for close examination."

XXV

The recognition of quality of surface has been Of texture.
almost lost sight of by the modern eye and mind.
It is a beauty that makes no effect on exhibition
walls, and therefore people have ceased to look
for it. It is the want of quality in Romney
that places him so immeasurably lower than
Reynolds. When translated into black and white
mezzotint Romney almost rivals Reynolds. The
first artistic efforts were certainly in the direction
of realism, but later man came to feel that the
real alone did not suffice. What was meant to
be a permanent representation must be some-
thing more than a realistic rendering of the
outer aspect. The personal and changing aspect
was felt to be too individual to represent what
was impersonal and eternal, therefore the artist—
probably without a conscious effort—modified
the character of his work, and gave large truths

THOUGHTS ON ART

Of texture. in place of facts. This effort was maintained so long as art was employed to decorate large buildings, or to fill large spaces. The effect of this is found in all art of the time, even in portraiture.

The basis of all true art should be the beautiful ; and, like nature, a picture should look well quite near or twenty feet off. Pictures wholly painted for effect at a great distance cannot be called fine art ; it is the art of the scene-painter and good in its place, but not great.

XXVI

Of the
quality of
distinction.

The loss of the clear edge in all sculpture and metal work corresponds with the smear in painting and the slur in music. It is the difference between the language one would use in giving a distinct order and the language one would use when making a little flowery speech. One is definite, clear, distinct, spoken with a purpose, the other is merely playing with words.

What can be the value of a picture painted from a momentary glance ? A dab of green may be clever as suggesting a tree, but where is its truth as a representation, or rather I should say a revelation of nature ?

XXVII

The
qualities
vary.

Talking one day of Tolstoi's view of art, and that he appeared to say that bad art was not art, Mr. Watts differed. "It is not so," he said ; "varying degrees there are and may be in art

THOUGHTS ON ART

from lowest to highest ; even amongst the The greatest of the artists the whole assemblage of qualities is not to be found. Titian as a vary. religious painter might be condemned for want of sentiment were it not for what I call the righteousness of the reserved splendour of his art."

XXVIII

"Even one great quality may save a work of Quality. art and make it worthy of preservation, and the greatest master the world has ever seen has not attained to producing the whole assemblage of great qualities."

XXIX

In sculpture a sense of remoteness is required Principles in even more than in painting. The more real and sculpture. unlike an illusion the material of your art permits your work to be, the more you must modify that by a sense of remoteness. The rotundity and naturalness of sculpture cannot have any dignity unless it has this sense of removedness, and without dignity sculpture is worthless. Sharp fore-shortenings are always to be avoided in relief. Get the principal lines strong and flat, for that is the secret of monumental effect. The lines should be as precise and sharp as the lines of the twigs on any tree.

XXX

In a drawing from a piece of architecture, The while you require the flexibility of the original, qualities of stability and weight must also be suggested. weight and stability.

THOUGHTS ON ART

The qualities of weight and stability. Two laws are always in action, force propelling and gravitation steadying.

XXXI

The practice. Draw constantly from drapery. The eye gets as it were in tune with the law of form and line, and by constant study the mind acquires that knowledge of the natural law which is necessary for great ideal art, where exact imitation ceases to be needed—indeed would be out of place. The truth of natural law must never be disregarded, all is false and worthless if it is.

XXXII

Principles. In Bas-relief the edges, however low the relief may be, should be sharp. Lines that are blurred in the ground are bad.

XXXIII

Principles. The leg upon which the weight of the body is thrown should be so far directly under the torso that a line drawn from the centre of the torso should strike through the heel of this supporting leg.

As a principle, when painting an abstract idea with the distinct intention of making it impressive and serious, all flimsiness of form and colour must be avoided.

XXXIV

Of the amateur. One of the peculiarities of modern civilisation is the transference of all efforts of an artistic

THOUGHTS ON ART

Of copying. however great. Copying in its effect retards rather than forwards artistic education.

XXXVII

If I had a school I should make my pupils draw from the model a head in full face, and then without the model, and from knowledge alone, they should make a drawing of the three-quarter face. I should let them look at the nude for reference but never allow them to copy exactly. There is nothing to be learnt by copying the nude, it is all so much wasted time. The Greeks never set up a model ; they saw what we never see, the human creature constantly before their eyes, and as the Creator intended him to be.

XXXVIII

On art
generally :
completion.

A work of art must never be incomplete, but completeness is a relative term. The completeness of the Van Dyck in the National Gallery is different from the completeness of the ' Prophets and Sibyls.' Visions in art may be visionary, but, while much may be left out, nothing may be added.

XXXIX

Dexterity.

In an age of rapidity and dexterity art will no doubt, and very rightly, come naturally to manifest these qualities. The future art may be effective and even impressive, but it can hardly retain the grand dignity characteristic of times more favourable to its noblest development.

THOUGHTS ON ART

That art which tries conclusions with nature Dexterity.
will naturally be popular while the results are
novel in their dexterity and truth ; but the
moment science beats the artist who is only made
up of eyes and hands—and this it will by
producing imitations of a subtlety and delicacy
hands will not be able to compete with,—then
realistic art will be as valueless as the common
miniature by the side of the photograph.

XL

Realism when it means honesty and earnest- Realism.
ness needs no defence ; and of impressionism as
much may be said ; for all art at the highest
must be impressionistic, as realism could not
represent the purely ideal.

XLI

The idea and estimation of art is too Technique.
commonly associated with the skill displayed in
the technical qualities. These certainly are not
to be under-valued, but though these are
extremely important as the means of making the
poetical and intellectual aims understood, the
art mainly to be esteemed for these qualities
can never take its place by the side of the great
productions of those artists who worked under
the influence of nobler objects.

XLII

To suggest to the human mind its loftiest Dexterity.
attributes is surely a greater thing than to present